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Four days after that meeting between Attwood and Daniel, I gave Cuba's main address in the General Assembly. It was the first General Assembly after the crisis, and 10 months had passed since the messages had been sent to the Security Council concluding the negotiations. I reviewed all the items on the agenda and said that the Cuban delegation would have liked to join in the prevailing optimism concerning the international situation, but that the realities with which Cuba was confronted didn't allow us to do so. The atmosphere of intrigues and conspiracies which pervaded the Caribbean, as in the previous year, led us to a different viewpoint — the result of tangible facts and lamentable circumstances that adversely affected Cuba's independence and sovereignty, for Cuba was still the victim of covert intervention in its internal affairs and of attacks by the United States.

I then read the long list of attacks that had been made against Cuba during the year and set forth Cuba's position on the Treaty of Moscow — the one on the partial banning of nuclear testing. I should note here that the Soviet government wanted Cuba to sign it, and the White House exhorted the Soviet diplomats to convince Havana to sign. In an interview Gromyko had with Kennedy five days after my address in the General Assembly, the President told him that his government would welcome the Cubans signing the Treaty; the Soviet Minister replied that Cuba had already stated its position in the United Nations.

Why didn't Cuba sign that pact? These were the reasons I gave on behalf of the revolutionary government:

- Cuba couldn't sign it because one of the signing powers had created a state of undeclared war against our country. During the Missile Crisis, the Cuban government had warned that there would be no real peace for its people as long as the government of the United States persisted in grossly violating the Cuban people's most basic rights.
- The U.S. government maintained the economic blockade and was continuing to take measures all over the world to commercially and economically harass our country; it was continuing its subversive activities of dropping and landing weapons and explosives by air and sea and of infiltrating spies and saboteurs; it was still systematically violating Cuba's airspace and territorial waters; and it maintained the Guantánamo Naval Base, in defiance of our sovereignty.
- Cuba wouldn't sign the Treaty as long as the government of the United States continued those activities, even though its refusal to sign wouldn't, of course, affect the practical results of the Treaty. Cuba was not a nuclear power and lacked the resources to become one, but it was duty-bound to take a moral stand in the United Nations based on the inviolable principles of its international policy.

When I finished speaking, Ambassador Stevenson replied to the charges I had made against his government. He said he had hoped that the General Assembly had been freed of what he called immoderate Cold War rhetoric. He pointed out that one speaker after another had welcomed the new way of life on the international scene but that the speech by "the gentleman from Cuba" had been an exception. He spoke of Cuba's supposed subversive actions in Latin America and said that the United States denounced the use of its own territory for acts of violence against Cuba. (Yet, when Attwood had proposed the meeting with me, Stevenson himself had commented that, unfortunately, the CIA was still in charge of everything to do with Cuba.)

Curiously, it was William Attwood who wrote Stevenson's speech, but the incident didn't affect the contacts that had been established. [155]

On October 21, Gordon Chase, the contact in the White House, called Attwood in New York to ask if his efforts had borne any fruit. Attwood told him that he hadn't yet received any reaction from Havana. On October 28, I met again with the U.S. diplomat in the UN Delegates Lounge and told him that Havana was considering his proposal, but that it wasn't going to be possible for a high-ranking functionary of the Cuban

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[155] Attwood, *The twilight struggle*, 260.

government to go to the United States, even though somebody from Washington — possibly Attwood himself — would be welcome in our country.

As Attwood stated in his memoirs, Washington was giving more and more attention to talks with Cuba. Attwood kept Stevenson and Chase informed of all his contacts and was called to the White House on November 4 to talk with Bundy, who told him that the President was more interested in the matter than the State Department and asked him to write a memorandum describing, in chronological order, the contacts he had had, starting with his first conversation with Lisa Howard. Later, on November 12, Bundy called New York reminding him that the President was in favor of a preliminary discussion of the agenda for any meeting that might be arranged between an envoy of his and one of Fidel Castro's, either in Cuba or in the United Nations.

Without my knowledge, it seems that Lisa Howard — who had met Commander René Vallejo, aide to Prime Minister Castro, when she had been in Cuba — contacted him and asked him to take a call from Ambassador Attwood. In his memoirs, Attwood said that he spoke with Vallejo on November 18 and that Vallejo told him that the Prime Minister would send me instructions for discussing the agenda with him in New York. Attwood informed Bundy of that conversation, and Bundy told him that as soon as the agenda was agreed upon Kennedy himself would speak with him to decide what he should tell Castro. He added that Kennedy was making a brief trip to Dallas but would be back in Washington soon.

A few days before that trip to Texas, the French journalist Daniel met with Kennedy at the White House. Daniel has written that he began the interview by asking the President if the ideas contained in his statements when he was a senator supporting the Algerian revolution had been faithfully applied in Saigon and in Havana.[156] The President said that he didn't have time to talk about Saigon, but that he wanted to talk about Cuba and

[156] *National Guardian*, December 19, 1963.

continue the discussion when Daniel returned from Cuba. Kennedy commented that the European press accused the United States of being blind to the real situation in Cuba, but said that he was perfectly aware of what was going on there. He criticized U.S. policy at the time of the Batista dictatorship and added that the problem was no longer a Cuban one but had become international — that is, a Soviet problem.

Daniel went to Cuba in November. In January 1992, in the meeting held in Havana, Fidel Castro revealed that he spoke with Daniel, who told him he had been very favorably impressed by Kennedy and that he brought a message from him. The talk with the Prime Minister took place at Varadero Beach.

> It wasn't a message in the formal sense of the word. Rather, Kennedy told him he wanted him to come to Cuba. He talked extensively about the crisis, about the enormous dangers that war would break out, the consequences of such a war and the fact that he wanted Daniel to talk with me and analyze the matter, and he asked him to ask me if I was aware of just how great the danger had been. The essence of the message was that Daniel should talk with me at length about all these things and then go back to the United States and report to him about our talk. Therefore, the journalist interpreted it as a gesture, as a wish to establish contact, a wish to explore what we thought about all this and also to establish communication. He told him to come here, talk, analyze this problem and go back. That was the essence.
>
> The journalist barely finished telling me everything he had to say. It was very early — I think it was 11:00, Dallas time. It wasn't even midday; we were going to have lunch, and, while we were talking, making those assessments, the news came over the radio that Kennedy had been seriously wounded in an assassination attempt.
>
> I interpreted Daniel's visit as a gesture to try to establish communication, a bridge, a contact, because Kennedy had so much authority inside his country after the crisis that he could do things he might not have been able to do before. I

think he had the courage to do it — it took courage to defy established ideas on all those things.

Later on, Fidel Castro commented:

> Look at the paradox, the contradictions and coincidences: on the same day and at the same hour that Jean Daniel was giving me Kennedy's message, an agent of the United States was handing over a fountain pen with a poison dart to be used in an assassination attempt against me. Look how many paradoxes and how many crazy things there are in the world![157]

Fidel Castro was referring to Desmond FitzGerald, a high-ranking CIA officer who had replaced the ridiculous William Harvey as head of the CIA's center of subversion in Miami, and who gave the lethal pen to Rolando Cubela, a Cuban counter-revolutionary known as agent AM/LASH, whom the CIA was paying to commit the crime.

After Kennedy's death, Vice-President Lyndon Johnson moved into the White House. On November 29, Lisa Howard sent me a message from Attwood saying that the efforts hadn't been called off yet, that nobody in the White House had instructed him to break off the contacts. I spoke with Attwood on December 2, and he repeated what the journalist had told me. Gordon Chase told Attwood that he should be patient, as all policies were being reviewed. On returning to the United States from Cuba, Daniel saw Bundy and told him about his talk with Fidel Castro. On December 12, Attwood called me to say that Washington hadn't made a decision yet. That was the last time I spoke with him until some years later when we met in Havana, where he had come with his wife on an unofficial visit.

In his memoirs, Attwood said that when the new President went to New York to address the General Assembly he had lunch

[157] Fidel Castro, Tripartite Conference, fifth session, January 11, 1992, 13-15. Translated from Spanish.

with the members of the U.S. delegation to the United Nations. He took the opportunity to tell Attwood that he had read with interest his memo on the efforts with Cuba, but he didn't make any other comment. In January, Johnson named Attwood as ambassador to Kenya. While Attwood was in Washington preparing for his trip, Chase told him that the President's team of advisers didn't seem to be interested in doing anything with regard to Cuba in an election year.

He should have added that the government didn't want to do anything positive in line with international law, because Johnson immediately arranged for another country to join the economic blockade against Cuba. On December 24, Johnson went to Texas to spend the Christmas holidays on his ranch, and Ludwig Erhard, the new Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, visited him there on the 28th and 29th. They hunted deer. Johnson sold him a lot of military equipment in "payment" for having six divisions of the U.S. Army in Germany and wound up his negotiations with the German Chancellor by asking him to join the economic blockade against Cuba. The Chancellor agreed.[158]

The mystery surrounding Kennedy's assassination still remains. Many clues indicate a conspiracy to eliminate him before he could be reelected, and well-founded speculation has it that the crime was moved forward because, as I have reported, he sought a rapprochement with the revolutionary government of Cuba, which might have resulted in a normalization of relations and the end of the U.S. policy of aggression. That may have tipped the scales in the decision to assassinate him. Historian Arthur Schlesinger, a collaborator of Kennedy's in the White House, thinks that the President's gesture of peace with Cuba was a factor in the death sentence that was decreed against him, and he refers to this in one of his books. Attwood, too, came to that conclusion. Three of the elements that are invariably mentioned as instruments in the assassination — the CIA, the Mafia and the

[158] Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, *Lyndon B. Johnson: The exercise of power* (New York: The New American Library, 1966), 389.

Cuban counterrevolutionaries at the service of the CIA — were dead set against the normalization of relations with Cuba. Those three elements had already given abundant proof of their lack of scruples for undertaking an action of that kind and were irrevocably committed to the plans to destroy the revolution and to assassinate Cuban leaders.

As Schlesinger described it, "Though the Attwood plan was closely held, it seems inconceivable that the CIA knew nothing about it. American intelligence had Cuban UN diplomats under incessant surveillance. It followed their movements, tapped their telephone calls, read their letters, intercepted their cables. Suspecting, as it must have, that Attwood and Lechuga were doing something more than exchanging daiquiri recipes, the CIA, in pursuing the AM/LASH operation, must be convicted either of abysmal incompetence, which is by no means to be excluded, or else of a studied attempt to wreck Kennedy's search for normalization."[159] Robert Kennedy, the murdered President's brother, suspected the CIA of having had a hand in the assassination. When Jim Garrison, District Attorney of New Orleans, began making sensational accusations about a conspiracy, Schlesinger asked Robert Kennedy what he thought of those accusations, and Kennedy replied, "Garrison might be onto something."[160] NBC television sent journalist Walter Sheridan to New Orleans to investigate Garrison's accusations against the CIA, and Robert Kennedy talked with him and told him that he had asked CIA Director John McCone if the CIA had killed his brother. "At the time I asked McCone. . . if they had killed my brother, and I asked him in a way that he couldn't lie to me, and they hadn't."[161] But suspicions remained of the CIA's involvement.

In the memoirs he published in 1987, Attwood also said that the CIA must have found out about the efforts he was making and that later on information was fed to the frustrated veterans of

[159] Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, 601.
[160] Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, 665.
[161] Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, 665.

the Bay of Pigs invasion, who hadn't lost hope of carrying out another attack protected by the CIA. Kennedy's feelers for normalizing relations with Cuba ended all their illusions.[162] Moreover, the Mafia had lost its gambling casinos, drug business and brothels when the revolution triumphed in Cuba, so the CIA had used it in the numerous attempts to kill Fidel Castro. Therefore, the Mafia, too, had a stake in preventing an agreement between the two countries.

More than 30 years have passed since the assassination in Dallas, and there is just as much speculation now as on the first day. Thus, the unforeseen consequences of the Missile Crisis claimed the life of the President of the United States.

[162] Attwood, *The twilight struggle*, 264.